

**Opening Remarks at the
Consultative Overview Meeting
("Family" roundtable)**

**IDRC
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Good morning, everyone - Bonjour tout le monde.

Je vous souhaite la bienvenue à notre table ronde consultative avec la "famille" de la politique étrangère.

Our discussions today will be in the language of your choice. The translation equipment is on the table in front of you. To assist the note-takers, we will be recording the proceedings, so please use the microphone when you speak — although, apart from our introductory tour de table, you need not introduce yourself each time you make an intervention.

I suggest that we begin with a brief tour de table. The name plates are clear enough, but I would nevertheless ask you to introduce yourselves in turn, giving your name, position and institutional affiliation. Starting on my right ...

(Tour de Table)

Thank you. I am most grateful to you all for taking a day out of your schedules at a busy time of year to join us in our reflections about possible "IDRC Futures". This is the title that we have used to encourage our staff to take time out from their day-to-day program activities and think corporately, strategically and long-term. What does the future look like for IDRC? What are the big trends in our operating environment – the context for our work, both here in Canada and in developing countries – to which we should pay most attention? What kind of institution should we aim to become by 2010? These are the kinds of questions that we are putting to our staff and Board and to the various interest groups whose views are important to us.

Looking at the outside world before examining our own navel too closely has always been our practice, but this time we are doing it more thoroughly. As you know, we have commissioned ten papers that study various features of our working environment. We will be using them to stimulate thinking and discussion, starting with the Canadian research and foreign policy

families; followed by our Board at a special retreat in October; then our staff, also in October; and then in four regional consultative workshops in the South: Asia; Middle East and North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; and Latin America and the Caribbean. We will sift and synthesise the results of all these deliberations and use them to establish the main parameters of our strategic directions for the next planning period, 2005 to 2010.

I should emphasise, however, that – while the short-term product is important – the process has value in and of itself. It reminds us that it is useful every five years or so to raise one's eyes from the immediate tasks and try to look over the horizon a bit and anticipate future possibilities – and threats. It forces us to think formally about those whose views and experience are important to us and to the fulfilment of our mission. It helps to build networks and perhaps establish new ones.(*other ideas??*)

We are assuming a degree of familiarity with IDRC as it is, so I will not spend any time introducing the Centre. Indeed, for an exercise of this nature, it is valuable to avoid any assumptions about structures, about programs and practices that may be difficult to change, about what might or might not be possible to consider. We want new ideas and it will up to us subsequently to sort out the doable dreams from the impossible.

But I would remind you of the liberating potential of our greatest assets: our Act of Parliament and our international Board of Governors. As long as it is within the domain of research, our Act offers enormous scope to initiate, encourage, support or conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world. We can enlist the talents of anyone, anywhere. We can work on the coordination of international development research. We can foster research cooperation on any axis: S-S, N-S, N-N. We are not agents of Her Majesty. We can enter into contracts with a wide range of partners.

And our Board gives a direction and flavour to our work that is unique in my experience and has a lot to do with the view in many parts of the world that we can play the “honest broker”/ “neutral territory” role and thereby constitute a valued and valuable partner.

We have other assets — but this is not a public relations pitch. I simply want to emphasise that many things are possible and I urge you to think about “IDRC Futures” in an unconstrained way, without worrying about limits or barriers.

Now, if I may, let me remind us of how we propose to proceed. We have the stimulus of the five papers that you have received. We are assuming some degree of familiarity with them and therefore have asked the authors to open the discussion – not by presenting their papers in full – so much as putting forward their views on our two core questions:

- a) what are those trends in their area of our operating environment that are – or will be – of greatest significance to IDRC?
- b) what might the implications of those trends be for the strategic directions of the Centre?

Since we wish to preserve the roundtable atmosphere of debate and discussion, we have also asked the authors to rely mostly on the power of rhetoric and to avoid classroom techniques such as PowerPoint; and to keep their opening remarks to 15 minutes or less. In the morning, we will work in pairs: Two authors will present, followed by two opening discussants from among you, whom we have asked to take 5 minutes each – one on each paper – and reflect briefly on the papers and the ideas within them. This has the disadvantage that one paper might receive more attention than another — but it will be my job to ensure “fair play”, so to speak.

I should make it clear that the purpose of our discussions is not to review the papers themselves, but to work on the ideas in them and on the ideas that they inspire. You may of course feel that something important is missing, or that some feature of the environment has been incorrectly described. This is part of the stimulus that we are looking for and we would ask you put forward an alternative viewpoint. Much later in the process, we will come to the question of finalizing the papers and making them more broadly available. And I am sure that the authors will be taking ideas from our discussions and thinking about possible refinements to their papers.

You will not be hearing much from us at IDRC today – unless you have questions of clarification. We describe these events as “IDRC in listening mode” – we want to hear from you, not the other way round.

After lunch, we will consider the ideas in the paper on knowledge networks and public policy; and to close the day, we propose a loosely structured tour de table, when each of you will have the opportunity to summarise your views on our two core questions.

I suggest that we make a start with our first two authors: Bernard Wood and Fen Hampson, on various aspects of the international development and cooperation and foreign policy contexts, starting with Bernard Wood ...